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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how people reflect, individually and collaboratively, in different cultural contexts, discussing the consequences for teacher education. The paper suggests that the ways in which people reflect individually are shared across cultures, but the ways in which people reflect together are structured differently by their varied cultures, and this may have important consequences for teacher education since student teachers come from diverse cultures. After presenting research on and examples of individual and collaborative reflection from several diverse cultures, the paper concludes that teacher educators must be prepared to teach their students how to access the tools of discussion, and the teaching should be guided by various cultural considerations. The considerations include: learning to embrace one's own cultural tools for collaborative reflection; learning not to take for granted that other people share the same customs of reflection; being aware of the importance of establishing group norms for the college; welcoming the insights of other cultures into the reflective process; and meeting the challenge of learning how to share one's own understandings with people from different cultures. (Contains 26 references.) (SM)

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Multicultural Reflection

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As a classroom teacher, I never thought of reflection as a good thing. I thought of it more as a bad habit—the reason why sometimes, lost in thought, I burned the family dinner. Now, as a teacher educator at the University of Washington, I have been asked to help students become reflective teachers. I wondered, at first, why I should pass on my bad habits. Working under Heidi McKenna's direction as a teaching assistant (TA), I have come to understand reflection as she defines it, "a set of skills which allows a person to accurately see themself and their relationship to the social and physical environment" (McKenna, unpublished, p. 2). Seeing these relationships clearly is important because teaching is, as Darling-Hammond (1994), describes it "complex, thoughtful work" (p. 5). To perform this complex work well, teachers need to be able to give honest consideration to what they are doing.

In the course of learning to value reflection, I have also constructed a new understanding of what reflection is. Ciriello, Valli, and Taylor (1992) describe reflection as a deliberative process, which articulates how I first understood it. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) extend my understanding by making a distinction between the more introspective process of reflection and the more collaborative process of reflective practice, "Reflective practice, while often confused with reflection, is neither solitary nor a relaxed meditative process. To the contrary, reflective practice is a challenging, demanding, and often trying process that is most successful as a collaborative effort" (p. 19). Reflective practice is interactive. Schön writes that "reflective practice takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation" (p. 295). Although Schön uses "conversation" metaphorically, "reflective practice" often means doing our work in a reflective way and talking about it with others. The construction of professional portfolios is an example of that kind of reflective practice.

Portfolios are not scrapbooks. They are thoughtful collections of preservice student work. In dialogue with their mentors, the TEP students write reflections about the artifacts they include in their portfolios. The reflections are gauged to display their growth as teachers. As a mentor, I have listened to the students review each other's work and I have realized that reflection is catalyzed by group discussion. Although portfolios are an individual product, the quality of the work is enhanced when the effort behind it is collaborative. This process has made me curious about the reflection which people do alone and the reflection which they do together.

My point of view on reflection is that of a mixblood[i] Choctaw woman. Because of my mixed heritage, I am inclined to look at social settings from more than one cultural perspective. Here, I will examine how people reflect, individually and collaboratively, in different cultural contexts. I find that the ways in which we reflect individually are shared across cultures. In contrast, the ways people reflect together are structured differently by their varied cultures. Intuitively, this idea makes sense. Collaborative reflection requires communication. How people communicate varies from one society to another. Therefore, collaborative reflection is likely to vary, as well. Might this have important consequences for teacher education? I suggest, that since our students come from diverse cultures, it does.

Reflection: Individual and Collaborative

My exploration of reflection began with the seminars in which I teach students how to become reflective practitioners.[ii] My students come from diverse cultural backgrounds. As I considered how to teach reflection in a multicultural seminar, I began to wonder how reflection looks outside of mainstream America. Is reflection alike across cultures? Do I serve my students badly if I assume that European American ideas of reflection are universal? Clift, Houston, and

Pugach (1990) suggest, "Current definitions of reflection are strongly influenced by the Western cultural heritage" (p. 211). I began a search to look for how reflection is practiced in other cultures. Please join me in viewing reflection through a multicultural lens.

Individual Reflection

The following sub-section includes examples of individual reflection from several cultures. Tremmel (1993) compares Zen Buddhist "mindfulness" with Schön's (1983) idea of "reflection in action." Rodriguez does not use the word "reflection," but in his essay, "Crossing Borders from the Beginning," he models reflection in an introspective struggle in which his identity as Chicano emerges as important. Lise Alexander (Grand Ronde) is a friend of mine who shares with us how reflection works for her, as an American Indian woman[iii]

Tremmel is fascinated with a comparison between the reflection which Schön describes as "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 54) and a similar way of being expressed in Zen philosophy as *zazen*, "There is an important common ground between mindfulness and reflection-in-action" (Tremmel, 1993, p. 444). According to Tremmel, "mindfulness" means "to pay attention to 'right here, right now' and to invest the present moment with full awareness and concentration" (p. 443). Tremmel sees a similarity with "reflection-in-action" which requires thinking on one's feet in a way which also requires attention to the present moment.

Another aspect of Zen Buddhism, Tremmel (1995) tells us, is the importance of self-awareness: "To study Zen is to study the self" (p. 454). Self-awareness is a valued component of reflection in other cultures, as well. Rodriguez (1997) reveals his reflective self-awareness in his search for identity:

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> The search for identity always entails the confrontation of unpleasant truths about our individual and collective past. It implies the willingness to struggle to divest ourselves of regressive notions and the courage to seek that which is more transcendent; that which promotes human dignity. It means leaving one's comfort zone in order to change and mature because change is a part of the reality of our existence....In a very real sense the search for identity is an individual conquest because it involves inner realities" (pp. 51–52).

To achieve his insights, Rodriguez (1997) is honest, open, and purposeful. The process through which he deepens his self-understanding is like the process Calderhead (1992) describes when he urges instructors to help their students, "Develop skills of critical analysis...and attitudes of openness and self-awareness" (p. 142).

Alexander (interview), who is Grande Ronde, describes a process she calls "listening," which also requires self-awareness:

> The cycle of listening starts with listening inside myself with a concept or an idea and then I listen to the outside environment; to other people; to whatever's coming to me from the outside and that gets appropriated back into my original thought and brings it full circle again. Through that listening, I can learn a lot about myself and my direction and where I need to go and what I need to do for my soul [Alexander, interview transcript, 1998].

In these examples from different cultures, individual reflection is broadly comparable. It is an introspective process which requires self-awareness. While Alexander, though, begins by "listening inside" herself, attuned to the "inner realities" which Rodriguez (1997) explores, she extends her awareness and "listens to the outside environment; to other people." Listening to other people is part of collaborative reflection.

Collaborative Reflection

Collaborative reflection begins with the individual communicating his or her concerns. Cinnamond and Zimpher (1990) write, "The ability of an individual to take the role of the other is accomplished through communication. Communication always implies the conveyance of meaning" (p. 61). Both how communication occurs, though, and what is communicated, varies from language to language and culture to culture.

Research on communication has described some of the ways in which people's communication differs (Heath, 1994/1983; Philips, 1972). Even silence conveys meaning in some cultures, while in others silence is no more than a pause in communication. Dumont (1972) studied the silence of Lakota and Cherokee students and noted the disparity between home talk and the "deliberate choice not to talk" in the classroom (p. 344). Silence in the classroom was tense with meaning, "a mouthed word, a shift in the body, a gesture, or a glance" (p. 346). For the teachers, "Education and learning were equated to talking while silence was equated to the absence of learning" (p. 345). Silence became a weapon in a battle of cultural resistance.

Plank (1994) saw silence among Navajo students as conveying more positive meaning. He noted that silence is, "A form of communication, it is not merely the lack of speaking" (p. 4). Silence indicates that something is going on, but Plank found that Navajo silence could be disconcerting for teachers who interpreted quiet as non-participation in class. Plank described contexts which gave silence appropriate meaning. Not to be silent in some settings indicated disrespect. For the Navajo students, silence was a form of communication.

In a 1987 study on Puyallup people, Guilmet and Whited quote a participant from an earlier study, "A perturbed Navajo father responded with some emotion: 'Next time you should study on those people who talk too much'" (Guilmet, 1976). Guilmet and Whited offer advice to medical practitioners who are working with American Indian and Alaska Native people: "Small talk is not popular. Words are important and powerful, used carefully, sparingly. Silence is acceptable, respected, and sometimes expected" (p. 43).

These examples show that communication may vary among cultures. Yet, collaborative reflection depends on communicating a common understanding across boundaries of differences. Collaborative reflection requires discussion. Collaborative reflection is people building on each other's ideas, constructing an almost palpable new reality between them. Berrill (1991) gives us a glimpse into what discussion looks like among undergraduates at Queen's University in Canada. She finds, "that students can generate alternative viewpoints, can evaluate them and can come to individual synthesis or group consensus" (p. 143). As the discussion progresses, Berrill observes, "participants become increasingly aware of their differences and the areas in which their understandings are shared" (p. 155). She calls this kind of discussion "argument building" and writes that it "typifies the talk of university undergraduates" (p. 156). One of the strategies that characterize argument building is challenging the evidence others bring to the discussion. Berrill writes, "Argument building is a dialogic act of discourse. The more possible it is for participants to make assumptions explicit and to evaluate the different assumptions that each individual brings to the discussion, the more successful the argument will be" (p. 156).

Argument, according to Tannen (1998) is also important to discussion in the United States, but she finds that the confrontation which results is not always a positive outcome:

> This book is about a pervasive warlike atmosphere that makes us approach public dialogue...as if it were a fight. It is a tendency in Western culture in general, and in the United States in particular, that has a long history and a deep, thick, and far-ranging root system (p. 3).

Tannen (1998) describes American society as "the argument culture" in which "criticism, attack, or opposition are predominant if not the only ways of responding to people or ideas" (p. 7). In Berrill's (1991) description, "argument" has a positive connotation, while in Tannen's work it is negative, "the argument culture urges us to approach the world—and the people in it—in an adversarial frame of mind" (p. 3). Whether "argument" has positive or negative connotations, Berrill and Tannen seem to agree that argument is part of some cultural models of discussion.

Emery (1996) describes small group discussion among English language arts teachers in Montreal. In his examination of teacher talk, one of the characteristics he looks for is "confronting." Emery, relying on the work of Smyth (1989), sees confronting as a step in revealing, "the nature of forces that inhibit and constrain" teachers (Emery, 1989, p. 5). He defines "confronting" as investigating the "larger social, cultural, and political contexts" in which theories are developed (Emery, 1996, p. 110). Teachers presented models of portfolio assessment in small groups. The groups then discussed the models. In one interchange, the presenter is in mid-sentence, when a participant interjects, "May I interrupt you for a minute?" (p. 114). The participant then challenges the presenter, confronting his ideas. Emery uses the passage as evidence that "confronting" behavior did occur. Emery, in Montreal, like Tannen (1998) in the United States, has found that confrontation is a component of discussion.

North American scholars have found that discussion is characterized by argument, confrontation, interruption, people building on each other's ideas, and clarifications of both the differences and similarities in people's ideas (Berrill, 1991, Emery, 1996, and Tannen, 1998). Discussion can be non-linear and it can be a process in which people examine their taken-for-granted assumptions (Berrill, 1991). These researchers have described discussion in North

America among English-speaking European Americans. Do their descriptions hold true for all North American cultures?

Long Standing Bear Chief is a writer and publisher from the Blackfeet Reservation. I asked him, in a series of conversations, to describe Blackfoot discussion. He told me, "We identify ourselves as members of a community. In council, for instance, one person may speak for five minutes or he may speak for an hour. We listen because what is being said is for the benefit of the group. We don't have to speak, because we don't need individual attention" (personal communication, 1999). The process Long Standing Bear Chief describes, although it may be a way in which people publicly share ideas, is not consistent with the descriptions of discussion which Berrill (1991), Emery (1996), and Tannen (1998) have given us. Interruption, argument, clarification, and confrontation are inappropriate, as is even more evident in Long Standing Bear Chief's description of the talking circle:

> Talking circle is a good way for people to consider important issues and get the input of everyone. People sit in a circle so that every body can be seen—their body language, everything. The leader passes the talking stick, which is a stick with an eagle feather or plume attached to it, to the person on his or her left. The talking stick goes around the circle. Each person may talk when he or she holds the talking stick. They may talk for as long as they want without interruption. Usually, when each person has spoken, they come to a group conclusion. The leader calls for a conclusion to the meeting. Maybe somebody presents a summary and everybody consents (Long Standing Bear Chief, personal communication, 1999).

In a talking circle once people have spoken, they do not speak again. If someone does not agree with one who has already spoken, he/she may not query or confront the speaker. It is not appropriate to ask for clarification or to offer verbal support. Long Standing Bear Chief (1999) explains, "If people agree with one another, they say '*Ahn-yah*' or 'Mm,' which indicates their full hearty agreement. It's like saying, 'You have spoken. That's right.' They let that person's words stand for their words. They don't have to say anything more, just acknowledge what they're saying." In talking circle, unlike the discussion which Emery (1996) and Tannen (1998) describe, confrontation is sanctioned. Ideas are stated, but not exchanged. Talking circle may be a forum for oratory. It is not a forum for discussion.

The extent to which confrontation is inappropriate in Blackfoot culture is apparent in the description Long Standing Bear Chief gives of a particular meeting. A public meeting was called in 1995 to consider why Glacier Park Incorporated, the concessionaire in Glacier National Park, was using Blackfoot water at their tourist lodge and restaurant in East Glacier without paying for it. Concerns were raised at the meeting; elder speakers shared their concerns at length; but no resolution was reached:

> People don't need to make accusations. They just wait to see what will happen next. Three years later most of the people on the Tribal Council lost their elections, because the people found out that Earl Old Person, the Tribal Chair and other Council members had cheated the people by secretly signing a contract (Long Standing Bear Chief, 1999).

Three years had elapsed before the initial concerns were met with public response. People did not confront the Tribal Council publicly with their suspicions.

I asked, "Bear Chief, you have told me sometimes, 'Think about this and tell me later what you think.' How long do people usually consider something before they respond?"

"Well," he answered, "in private conversation, maybe a day. If I don't hear back from you after awhile I think it's not important to you." Deliberation may be long in Blackfoot[iv] culture, occasionally even in private conversations.

Long Standing Bear Chief (1999) explains that at such a meeting the older men are the ones who raise the community's concerns:

> They are the grandfathers. Their wives come along to influence them, but they don't usually speak. The young people don't speak. A man will say, 'My wife and I discussed this.' He listens to his wife, so she doesn't have to speak at the meeting.

In Long Standing Bear Chief's example, elder men speak, while both young people and women are less likely to speak. This is not consistent with the pictures Berrill (1991) and Emery (1996) have given us. In their descriptions of the discussions of undergraduates and teachers, there are no age or gender constraints on the discussants.

In Blackfoot tradition, communal sharing of concerns is characterized proper respectful listening to the elders. Spokespeople are principally older men. Interruption, confrontation, and argument are not tolerated. Long Standing Bear Chief (1999) relates, "Sometimes our people say, 'You don't want to carry on like those white people. They're rude and they interrupt each other."

Blackfoot norms for communication are different from the norms Berrill (1991), Emery (1996), and Tannen (1998) describe for Canadian and U. S. discussion in most respects. In at least one respect, they are similar. I described Berrill's (1991) research to Long Standing Bear Chief. In addition to the findings I have already described, Berrill found that discussion is non-linear, in that participants in her study found themselves, "talking around" the subject. She argued, "Lack of linear structure may yield exploratory talk which is rich in providing deeper understanding for the participants" (p. 144). Long Standing Bear Chief noted that Blackfoot conversation can be similar, "People bring up stories which help illustrate the point. Sometimes they appear to be rambling." In this respect, Canadian and Blackfoot discussion seem comparable.

Blackfoot discussion seemed so different from Canadian and U. S. discussion, that I began to wonder if it is accurate to call Blackfoot discourse by the same name. The following excerpt from an interview suggests that Blackfoot people do ask for clarification in private conversation, but for them, public discourse is much more formal:

Jeri: The word now that is troubling me is 'discussion.' To me, 'discussion' means if I say something, then you say something in response to add to it. Do Blackfoot people engage in that kind of discussion?

Long Standing Bear Chief: Oh yeah, of course. People freely exchange information.

Jeri: In conversation?

Long Standing Bear Chief: Yeah.

Jeri: How about in meetings?

Long Standing Bear Chief: What I've described is some kind of what you might call an "Indian meeting." In an informal meeting, people are free to speak up when they want. Indian people are very dignified in the way they talk to one another. I don't remember them saying harsh words. If they're angry, they just acknowledge that they're angry. They make a joke about somebody. There wasn't argumentative discussion even in heated moments.

Jeri: But you still don't allow disruptions?

Long Standing Bear Chief: Disruptions are frowned upon. That's not good form.

Jeri: Is that in meetings or in private conversation?

Long Standing Bear Chief: In meetings. If someone comes to visit me or if I go visit them, I know the person.

Jeri: How about clarification? Do Blackfoot people ask for clarification?

Long Standing Bear Chief: Yes, they ask, 'I do not understand what you said. Can you tell me in another way what you mean?'

Key differences between Blackfoot discussion on the one hand, and Canadian and U.S. discussion on the other, seem to be: 1) the lack of confrontation or rebuttal in Blackfoot discussion and 2) willingness to develop ideas in public. In Canada and in the United States, discussion includes interacting with one another's ideas to develop a new understanding of an issue. Canadian and U.S. discussants ask for clarification even in public meetings and work verbally to build an understanding together. Emery (1996) and Tannen (1998) illustrate settings in which interruption is appropriate in Canada and the United States. There are other settings in which interruption is inappropriate: formal setting like U.S. Congressional meetings, for instance. Interruption merely seems more widely accepted for Canadian and U.S. people than for Blackfoot people. Blackfoot people may ask for clarification in private conversation, and may build on each other's ideas there, but not in formal meetings. Blackfoot differentiate carefully between casual conversation and the dignity required in public forum. In public, participants listen respectfully and deliberate on what they hear. They do not exchange ideas with the speaker.

Philips (1982) describes another people among whom confrontation is avoided and long periods of deliberation are more important that quick responses—the Warm Springs people. Philips reports that keeping words to a minimum and avoiding small talk are important to Warm Springs Indians: "In verbal presentations, value is placed on economy of speech, control…and probably most important, evidence that knowledge and forethought have been given to what is discussed" (p. 44). Philips describes General Council meetings where constraints on who may speak are similar to Blackfoot traditions:

> Those who fulfill the speaking roles are over 35 while those who fulfill the roles requiring physical activity are under 35, and usually under 30. Thus at General Council meetings, those who run the meetings and those who verbally raise issues of relevance to the whole tribe are older (p. 43).

For Blackfoot and Warm Springs people, public discourse is structured by respect for elders with orators speaking only once. Deliberation is silent. Confrontation and interruption are not tolerated. Their norms are similar to those described for Lakota, Cherokee, and Puyallup people: characterized by meaningful use of silence, respectful listening and long deliberation. The norms which make group discussion meaningful for European American people are not consistently appropriate for Lakota, Cherokee, Navajo, Puyallup, Blackfoot, and Warm Springs people. European American discussion is characterized by interchange of ideas, confrontation, and immediate response. Although American Indian people may call public discourse "discussion," their practice differs significantly from discussion as Berrill (1991), Emery (1996), and Tannen 1998) have described it.

Conclusion

While individual reflection is similar across cultures, the ways in which people conduct discussion, and hence, the ways in which they reflect together are remarkably different. Spindler and Spindler (1997) explain that not only how people communicate, but *what* they discuss is indicative of their culture: "It is not because we are all the same, or that we agree on most important matters, that there is an American culture. It is that somehow we agreed to worry, argue, fight, emulate, and agree or disagree about the same pivotal concerns" (p. 50). Tanner (1998) is justifiably offended by how argumentative U.S. discussion is, but there is a positive side to American (both Canadian and U.S) discussion. It has power for helping people develop understanding none of them may have had when they entered into discourse. That power may be inaccessible to those for whom American strategies are unfamiliar. Therefore, if we want people to have access to the tools of discussion, we must be prepared to teach them. Simultaneously, we should be aware of what we can learn from other cultural perspectives. Our teaching should be guided by the following considerations:

- We can learn to embrace our own cultural tools for collaborative reflection—no matter what cultural heritage we enjoy.
- We can learn not to take for granted that other people share the same customs of reflection.
- We can be aware of the importance of establishing group norms for the college in which we teach, and helping each other master norms which may not, at first, feel completely taken-for-granted for any of us.
- We can welcome the insights of other cultures into the reflective process.
- We can meet the challenge of learning how to share our own understanding with people for whom our ways are foreign.

As we educate our preservice teachers, we cannot afford to take for granted that our ways of reflecting together are universal. Discussion is a powerful tool for constructing new insights, but it is culturally explicit. As we share our understandings about discussion, we also stand to learn from the understandings of other cultures. From the perspectives of people who do not take our assumptions for granted, we gain a platform from which to both increase our own insights and see our own faulty assumptions in high relief.

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[i] I use William S. Penn's spelling: "mixblood" rather than "mixed blood" who prefers a spelling which suggests a new entity different from any of the individual cultures which a mixed blood person may inherit. Although I identify as Choctaw, I do not deny what, for me, is both a rich and sometimes problematic heritage from nine different European and First Nations.

[ii] The TEP TAs in our College of Education conduct Reflective Seminars gauged to help preservice teachers learn reflective practice. The seminars culminate in the final quarter when our students prepare their professional portfolios. The goals of the seminars, therefore, in addition to nurturing reflective practitioners, are to help the students prepare their professional portfolios. For the students, the concrete necessity of preparing a portfolio, which is our required exit document at the University of Washington, is sometimes more obvious than the need to become a reflective practitioner, so our job as TAs is to teach them reflection through the process of preparing their portfolios.

[iii] I am sorry I cannot tell you Alex' tribe because our American Indian cultures are also diverse, but to do so would be a breach of confidentiality since she may be identified by her tribe.

[iv] Although the reservation is called Blackfeet Reservation, Long Standing Bear Chief argues that is a mistranslation of the people's name, Siksika, which actually means "black foot." So, I use "Blackfoot" in referring to his people and their traditions.

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